

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION
FOR
Method and Apparatus for CAM with Reduced Cross-Coupling Interference

INVENTORS:

Chuen-Der Lien

Chau-Chin Wu

Prepared by:

Alan Heimlich

HEIMLICH LAW

5952 DIAL WAY

SAN JOSE, CA 95129

TEL: (408) 253-3860

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Method and Apparatus for CAM with Reduced Cross-Coupling Interference

RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This patent application is related to a co-pending application Serial No. (not yet assigned), filed on April 09, 2004 titled "Method and Apparatus for CAM with Selective Parallel Match Lines" by the same inventors as this application and assigned to the same assignee.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention pertains to memory devices. More particularly, the present invention relates to a method and apparatus for a CAM (Content Addressable Memory) with reduced cross-coupling interference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] CAMs are used in a variety of applications. They differ from RAM (Random Access Memory) because a RAM is presented an address and reads or writes data, whereas a CAM is capable of, among other things, being presented data and sensing if a matching entry is stored. In order to determine quickly if there is a matching entry, many locations may have to be checked simultaneously. This may consume large amounts of power and may slow the comparison. This presents a problem.

[0004] Additionally since many locations may be checked simultaneously, this may lead to cross-coupling interference which may affect the performance of a CAM. This presents a problem.

[0005] Figure 1 illustrates one CAM cell (CC) with a word line (WL_m), a match line (ML_m), data inputs for reading and writing (D_n and D_n*), and compare data lines (CD_n and CD_n*).

[0006] Figure 2 shows an array of CAM cells of dimension n columns by m rows. Each row of cells has a common word line, a common match line, and a single sense amplifier at the end of a row of CAM cells. For example, row 0 has word line WL₀ which communicates to CAM cells (CC) connected to data line pairs, DO/DO*, D1/D1*, D2/D2*, through D_n/D_n*. The match line ML₀ is also in communication with the CAM cells connected to these data line pairs and ML₀ communicates with sense amplifier 0 SA₀ located substantially at the end of the row of CAM cells (CC). This arrangement is repeated for m word lines WL_m, for m match lines ML_m, and for m sense amplifiers SA_m (i.e. WL₀, WL₁, WL₂, ..., WL_m, the corresponding ML₀, ML₁, ML₂, ..., ML_m, and the corresponding SA₀, SA₁, SA₂, ..., SA_m). Since there is one match line per row and one sense amplifier per row at the end of a row of a CAM array, many CAM cells are connected to a single match line. Capacitance on this line may be large and as a result the sense amplifier may be slow in responding to signal changes. This may present a problem.

[0007] Figure 3 shows an approach 300 trying to overcome some of the problems associated with the approach shown in Figure 2. Here in Figure 3, the CAM array is divided into sub-arrays (for example, Sub-Array A and Sub-Array B). In each row and in between two sub-arrays, is one sense amplifier (such as SA₀) which receives two match lines one from the left (such as Sub-Array A, ML_{0A}) and the other from right (such as Sub-Array B, ML_{0B}). Because a particular match line in Figure 3 connects to half as many CAM

cells as in Figure 2 for a given array size, the capacitance on each match line (such as

ML0A, and ML0B) is approximately half. This results in better speed. However the two input sense amplifier may be larger in die size and may draw higher power than a single input sense amplifier. This may present a problem.

[0008] Figure 4 illustrates a layout 400 for a TCAM cell. For illustrative purposes only straight metal lines are shown, and not interconnects (such as vias). The dashed line indicates a single TCAM cell. This single TCAM cell may be repeated to produce a group of cells. Additionally for illustrative purposes, example metal layers are denoted. Here on metal layer 2 is Low_Match. Running substantially parallel to Low_Match, from left to right, on metal layer 3 is Value_Bit_Line, Value_Bit_Line*, Data_Line*, Data_Line, Mask_Bit_Line, and Mask_Bit_Line*. Running substantially perpendicular to Low_Match, from top to bottom, is Bypass on metal 5, and High_Match line on metal 4. As will be noted Low_Match on metal 2 runs parallel and physically close to Data_Line on metal 3 and Data_Line* on metal 3. This proximity leads to capacitive and inductive coupling between these lines. Additionally the overlap between the Bypass line on metal 5 and Data_Line* on metal 3 and Data_Line on metal 3 leads to coupling between these lines. Also the overlap between the High_Match line on metal 4 and Data_Line* on metal 3 and Data_Line on metal 3 leads to coupling between these lines. This may present a problem.

[0009] Figure 5 illustrates a layout 500 for a TCAM cell. For illustrative purposes only straight metal lines are shown, and only a single via interconnect High_Match Via Pickup is shown. The dashed line indicates a single TCAM cell. This single TCAM cell may be repeated to produce a group of cells. Additionally for illustrative purposes, example metal layers are denoted. Here on metal layer 2 is Low_Match. Running substantially parallel to

Low_Match, from left to right, on metal layer 3 is Value_Bit_Line, Value_Bit_Line*,

Data_Line*, Data_Line, Mask_Bit_Line, and Mask_Bit_Line*. Running substantially perpendicular to Low_Match, from top to bottom, is Bypass on metal 5, and High_Match line on metal 4. Via interconnect High_Match Via Pickup is shown as a dark dotted box on High_Match and may, for illustrative purposes, be considered to extend normal to the paper surface downward to connect to a device, such as the source of a transistor (for example, see the source of Q22 in Figure 14). High_Match Via Pickup traverses the metal layers (including metal 3) as it connects to a device in the TCAM cell and is physically close to Data_Line on metal 3 and Data_Line* on metal 3. This proximity leads to capacitive and inductive coupling between these lines. This may present a problem.

[0010] Figure 6 illustrates a layout 600 for a TCAM cell. For illustrative purposes only straight metal lines are shown, and only a single via interconnect Low_Match Via Pickup is shown. The dashed line indicates a single TCAM cell. This single TCAM cell may be repeated to produce a group of cells. Additionally for illustrative purposes, example metal layers are denoted. Here on metal layer 2 is Low_Match. Running substantially parallel to Low_Match, from left to right, on metal layer 3 is Value_Bit_Line, Value_Bit_Line*, Data_Line*, Data_Line, Mask_Bit_Line, and Mask_Bit_Line*. Running substantially perpendicular to Low_Match, from top to bottom, is Bypass on metal 5, and High_Match line on metal 4. Via interconnect Low_Match Via Pickup is shown as a dark dotted box on Low_Match and may, for illustrative purposes, be considered to extend normal to the paper surface downward to connect to a device, such as the drain of a transistor (for example, see the drain of Q26 in Figure 14). Low_Match Via Pickup traverses the metal layers (including metal 1) as it connects to a device in the TCAM cell and is physically close to

Data_Line on metal 3 and Data_Line* on metal 3. This proximity leads to capacitive and

inductive coupling between these lines. This may present a problem.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] The invention is illustrated by way of example and not limitation in the figures of the accompanying drawings in which:

[0012] Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5, and Figure 6 illustrate some current approaches;

[0013] Figure 7 illustrates one embodiment of the invention showing in block diagram form how a series of submatch lines associated with cells in a row are connected to a sense circuit;

[0014] Figure 8 illustrates one embodiment of the invention where every other cell is connected to a different submatch line;

[0015] Figure 9 illustrates one embodiment of the invention where every other cell is connected to a different submatch line and where a submatch line is extended in length;

[0016] Figure 10 illustrates one embodiment of the invention where different cells are connected to a variety of sense circuits;

[0017] Figure 11 illustrates one embodiment of the invention where a submatch line may be connected to a variety of sense circuits;

[0018] Figure 12 illustrates one embodiment of the invention where a cell may be connected to more than one submatch line;

[0019] Figure 13 illustrates one embodiment of the invention in flow chart form;

[0020] Figure 14 illustrates one embodiment of the invention in schematic form;

[0021] Figure 15, Figure 16, and Figure 17 illustrate embodiments of the invention for cell routing;

[0022] Figure 18 illustrates a layout for a TCAM cell showing two TCAM cells for one

embodiment of the invention;

[0023] Figure 19 illustrates a layout for a TCAM cell showing two TCAM cells and a Low Match pickup for one embodiment of the invention;

[0024] Figure 20 illustrates one embodiment of the invention showing a single dat line via pickup; and

[0025] Figure 21 illustrates one embodiment of the invention showing only metal 2 for the TCAM cell illustrated in Figure 20.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0026] The invention, as exemplified in various embodiments, illustrates how a CAM may reduce cross-coupling interference. In one embodiment of the invention, a series of submatch lines are used to reduce capacitance seen by a sense circuit (such as a sense amplifier). In one embodiment of the invention, the connections to cells in a row are implemented using various interconnection approaches. In one embodiment of the invention, signal lines are routed in such a fashion as to help reduce some cross-coupling interference.

[0027] Figure 7 illustrates one embodiment of the invention 700 showing in block diagram form how a series of submatch lines (MLSL1 through MLSLy) associated with cells in a row (710-1 through 710-z) are connected to a sense circuit (702). For clarity of illustration, only cells and the associated match lines are shown. Note that not all the cells are connected using a single match line. For example three cells 710-1, 710-2, and 710-3 are connected using a single match line. For example three cells 710-1, 710-2, and 710-3 are connected via match line submatch line 1 (MLSL1) to the sense circuit 702. Four cells 710-4, 710-5, 710-6, and 710-7 are connected via MLSL2 to the sense circuit 702. Two cells 710-8, and 710-9 are connected via MLSL3 to the sense circuit 702. One of skill in the art will appreciate that this approach may be extended and so MLSLy is shown connecting cell 710-z to sense circuit 702.

[0028] In one embodiment of the invention the diagram in Figure 7 may be used to illustrate a method for achieving substantially equal capacitance on the input lines to a sense circuit (such as 702). For example, if Figure 7 denotes a spatial relationship

between the cells in a row (710-1 through 710-z) and the sense circuit (702), then there is

capacitance associated with, among other things, the distance of a submatch line. There is also capacitance associated with connection to each cell. Since capacitance is related to time delay, then substantially matching the capacitance on the submatch lines may speed operation of sensing the submatch lines. Thus, for example, in Figure 7, submatch line MLSL1 is longer in length than MLSL2. Thus, MLSL1 may be expected to have a higher capacitance than MLSL2 assuming they are routed substantially the same and use a similar interconnect approach (for example, the same interconnect layers on an integrated circuit (IC)) due to the length of MLSL1 being longer than MLSL2. However, MLSL1 only connects to three cells (701-1, 710-2, and 710-3), whereas MLSL2 connects to four cells (710-4, 710-5, 710-6, and 710-7) and thus the capacitance associated with MLSL2 connecting to four cells may be expected to be higher than MLSL1 which is connected to three cells, again assuming they are routed substantially the same and use a similar interconnect approach. Thus, it is possible, that the capacitance seen by a sense circuit 702 on varying submatch lines may be substantially the same.

[0029] One of skill in the IC art will appreciate that connections, coupling, and routing of signal lines, such as match lines, submatch lines, etc. may be achieved using various interconnect layers on an IC, for example, on varying metal layers, polysilicon layers, implanted layers, using vias, or any combination of these. Also, each interconnect layer on an IC has different capacitance characteristics. Thus, for example, to reduce routing capacitance, a route (or trace) may be on an upper metal layer, whereas a shorter route may use a lower metal layer and/or polysilicon which may have a higher capacitance and/or resistance that may affect signal delay.

[0030] In one embodiment of the invention, submatch lines may use a variety of

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different layers (interconnect layers) to connect to the cells. Thus, for example, if submatch line MLSL3 uses layers that result in higher routing capacitance than say MLSL1 and MLSL2, then to maintain substantially the same capacitive load as MLSL1 and MLSL2, MLSL3 may only connect to two cells 410-8, and 410-9.

[0031] Figure 8 illustrates one embodiment of the invention 800 where every other cell in a row is connected to a different submatch line. For example, submatch line MLSL1 connects cells 810-1, 810-3, 810-5, 810-7, 810-9, to 810-z+1 to sense circuit 802, while MLSL2 connects cells 810-2, 810-4, 810-6, 810-8, to 810-z to sense circuit 802.

[0032] Figure 9 illustrates one embodiment of the invention 900 where every other cell in a particular row is connected to a different submatch line and where submatch line MLSL2 is extended in length (segment 920). This stub 920 may be used to increase the capacitance of submatch line MLSL2 to more closely match it to the capacitance of submatch line MLSL1. One of skill in the art will recognize that this approach may be used on any submatch line to create additional capacitance.

[0033] Figure 10 illustrates one embodiment of the invention 1000 where different cells are connected to a variety of sense circuits (1002-1 through 1002-n). For example, submatch line MLSL1 connects only cells 1010-1, and 1010-2 to sense circuit 1002-1. Since sense circuit 1002-1 only has a single input, this embodiment may speed detection of matches associated with cells 1010-1, and 1010-2. Sense circuit 1002-2 has two inputs MLSL2 and MLSL3 which couple cells 1010-5 and 1010-6 via MLSL2, and 1010-4 and 1010-7 via MLSL3. Sense circuit 1002-n is shown connected to cell 1010-8 and 1010-z via submatch line MLSLy, and 1010-9 is routed directly to sense circuit 1002-n. Cell 1010-

embodiment cell 1010-3 may be connected to another subarray submatch line.

[0034] Figure 11 illustrates one embodiment of the invention 1100 where a submatch line may be connected to a variety of sense circuits (1102-1 through 1102-n). For example, submatch line MLSL1 connects cells 1110-1, and 1110-2 to sense circuit 1102-1 and sense circuit 1102-2. Since sense circuit 1102-1 only has a single input, this embodiment may speed detection of matches associated with cells 1110-1, and 1110-2. Sense circuit 1102-2 has three inputs connecting to MLSL1, MLSL2, and MLSL3 which couple cells 1110-1, 1110-2 via MLSL1, 1110-3, and 1110-5 via MLSL2, and 1110-4, 1110-6, and 1110-7 via MLSL3. Sense circuit 1102-n is shown connected to cell 1110-8 and 1110-z via submatch line MLSLy, and 1110-9 is routed directly to sense circuit 1102-n. One of skill in the art will appreciate that by having different cells connected to different submatch lines that can then be connected in different combinations to different sense circuits allows for greater flexibility in performing matches.

[0035] The CAM cells (1110-1 through 1110-z) of Figure 11, when physically implemented, for example, on an IC may be arranged in a row where CC 1110-1 is physically farther from Sense Circuit 1102-1 than CC 1110-z. If line MLSL1 is routed through (but not connected to) 1110-3 through 1110-z, line MLSL1 “bypasses” some cells. As disclosed below, bypass lines are used to accommodate this type of connection and routing.

[0036] Figure 12 illustrates one embodiment of the invention 1200 where a cell may be connected to more than one submatch line. For example, cell 1210-1 is connected to submatch line MLSL1 as well as MLSL3. Cell 1210-1 may have two logically different

for a cell are illustrated in Figure 12, one of skill in the art will recognize that any number of match outputs are possible and they may be indicative of a single match of contents or multiple matches of differing contents. Additionally, these multiple outputs may be connected to any number of submatch lines. MLSL1 connects cells 1210-1, and 1210-2 to sense circuit 1202-1. Sense circuit 1202-2 has three inputs MLSL2, MLSL3, and MLSL4 which couple cells 1210-3, 1210-5, and 1210-6 via MLSL2, 1210-1, 1210-4, and 1210-7 via MLSL3, and 1210-3 and 1210-8 via MLSL4. Sense circuit 1202-n is shown connected to cell 1210-9 directly, to 1210-z via submatch line MLSLy, and to 1210-3 and 1210-8 via MLSL4.

[0037] Figure 13 illustrates one embodiment of the invention 1300 in flow chart form. At 1302-1 submatch line 1 signal is received. If there is more than one submatch line input, then additional inputs are received up to an arbitrary number n at 1302-n. At 1304 the state of the submatch line(s) is sensed and at 1306 an output is generated indicative of a match condition.

[0038] One of skill in the art will appreciate that in alternative embodiments of the invention other implementations are possible. For example, the submatch lines may not only be connected to different cells and sense circuits (such as sense amplifiers) but also use different interconnect layers on an IC.

[0039] While the present description has not detailed the internal workings of a CAM, one of skill in the art will appreciate that the present invention is applicable to regular CAMs as well as ternary CAMs (TCAMs), and CAM cells capable of comparing contents against more than one data comparison signal. For example, the present invention may be used

where a single CAM cell is capable of generating a series of outputs resulting from a

comparison of two or more compare data inputs. Thus, the illustration of one or more submatch lines is to be understood to include multiple submatch lines, as well as, the results of possible multiple comparisons.

[0040] Figure 14 illustrates one embodiment of the invention in schematic form. 1400 illustrates a ternary CAM (TCAM) with high and low match lines. Transistors Q1 (PMOS), Q2 (NMOS), Q3 (PMOS), and Q4 (NMOS) form a memory cell. VDD is a source of positive voltage with respect to GND. Values of this memory cell (Q1-Q4) may be read/written by reading/writing the value of Value_Bit_Line and its complement Value_Bit_Line* through transistors Q5 and Q6 respectively when Word_Line is taken to a sufficient positive voltage.

[0041] Transistors Q11 (PMOS), Q12 (NMOS), Q13 (PMOS), and Q14 (NMOS) form a memory cell for holding a masking bit value. VDD is a source of positive voltage with respect to GND. Values of this masking bit cell (Q11-Q14) may be read/written by reading/writing the value of Mask_Bit_Line and its complement Mask_Bit_Line* through transistors Q15 and Q16 respectively when Word_Line is taken to a sufficient positive voltage.

[0042] Transistors Q21 (NMOS), Q22 (NMOS), Q23 (NMOS), Q24 (NMOS), Q25 (NMOS), and Q26 (NMOS) form a NXOR (negative XOR) circuit. The source of Q21 and the source of Q22 are connected to a High_Match line. The drain of Q26 and the drain of Q25 are connected to a Low_Match line. The gate of Q24 is connected to the source of Q4, and the gate of Q23 is connected to the source of Q2. The gate of Q25 is connected to a Data_Line and Q26 is connected to Data_Line*.

[0043] During a compare operation the data presented to the Data_Line and Data_Line*

inputs is compared with the memory cell (Q1-Q4) contents via the NXOR circuit which will

operate when the gate of Q22 and the gate of Q21, which are connected to the source of Q12, is at a sufficient positive voltage.

[0044] In Figure 14 is shown a single High_Match. What is to be appreciated is that for different groups of TCAM cells multiple match lines are possible as discussed above. For example, in one embodiment, there may be a High_Match_1 line and a High_Match_2 line.

[0045] When a CAM is physically implemented there are a variety of considerations, such as, but not limited to, power, size, speed, etc. Additionally, there may be unwanted effects such as interference that may affect performance. This interference may come from a variety of sources, such as supply voltage variations, ground bounce, cross-coupling of signal lines, etc.

[0046] In one embodiment of the invention, a TCAM cell such as that illustrated in Figure 14, when laid out on an IC will physically connect the NXOR logic via signal lines to the High_Match, the Low_Match, the Data_Line, and the Data_Line*. Due to the proximity of the lines it is possible for the Data_Line and Data_Line* to be coupled to the Low_Match and/or High_Match lines such that when the Low_Match and/or High_Match lines quickly transition from, for example, a high voltage to a lower voltage, then Data_Line and/or Data_Line* may also be coupled lower. This may lower the match cell (Q21-Q25) current which can affect the speed and/or reliability of operation. If Data_Line and Data_Line* are moved away from the NXOR logic area this reduces the wire to wire coupling and may improve the speed.

[0047] In one embodiment of the invention, the cross-coupling interference may be reduced by having a line, such as GND or VDD between the Data_Line and the Data_Line*.

[0048] Figure 15 illustrates a layout 1500 for a TCAM cell showing two TCAM cells

(each shown by dashed lines) for one embodiment of the invention. For illustrative purposes only straight metal lines are shown, and not interconnects (such as vias), or short jogs of the metal lines. Each dashed line box indicates a single TCAM cell. This single TCAM cell may be repeated to produce a group of cells. Additionally for illustrative purposes, example metal layers for this embodiment are denoted. Here on metal layer 2 is Low_Match. Running substantially parallel to Low_Match, from left to right, on metal layer 3 is Value_Bit_Line, Data_Line, Value_Bit_Line*, Mask_Bit_Line, Data_Line*, and Mask_Bit_Line*. Running substantially perpendicular to Low_Match, from top to bottom, is High_Match_2 on metal 4, High_Match_1 on metal 4, Bypass_1 on metal 5, Bypass_2 on metal 5, High_Match_1 on metal 4, and High_Match_2 on metal 4.

[0049] As will be noted in Figure 15 Low_Match on metal 2 runs substantially parallel and physically close to Value_Bit_Line* on metal 3 and Mask_Bit_Line on metal 3 which separates Low_Match some additional distance (as compared with Figure 4) from Data_Line on metal 3 and Data_Line* on metal 3. This additional distance, as compared with, for example that of Figure 4, leads to reduced capacitive and inductive coupling between the Low_Match and Data_Line and Data_Line* lines.

[0050] Additionally, Figure 15 illustrates two high match lines High_Match_1 and High_Match_2. Since there are two high match lines, for a given array of cell sizes, they need only connect to, for example, half the number of cells as that illustrated in Figure 4 for a similar array size. Thus, the capacitive load on each match line may be less than that of using a single match line.

[0051] Additionally, Figure 15 illustrates two bypass lines Bypass_1 and Bypass_2.

need only connect to, for example, half the number of cells as that illustrated in Figure 4. Thus, the capacitive load on each bypass line may be less than that of using a single bypass line.

[0052] Other embodiments of the present invention for routing of a TCAM cell are possible for reducing cross-coupled interference. For example, other lines such as VDD and/or GND may be positioned between, for example, the Low_Match line and Data_Line and Data_Line*.

[0053] Figure 16 illustrates one embodiment 1400 where two GND lines, one on each side of Low_Match are between Low_Match and Data_Line and Data_Line*. For illustrative purposes, the metal layers, high match lines, and bypass lines are not shown. One of skill in the art will appreciate that the routes (signal lines) may be on any layer as determined by a designer.

[0054] One of skill in the art will appreciate that many variations of the order of the signal routings may be made to reduce cross-coupling. For example, more than one signal line may be routed between Low_Match and Data_Line and/or Data_Line*. Figure 17 illustrates one such arrangement 1700. Here GND is between Low-Match and Data_Line, and VDD and Value_Bit_Line* is between Low-Match and Data_Line*.

[0055] One of skill in the art will note that the preceding discussion dealt primarily with cross-coupling between substantially parallel lines. There are additional sources of cross-coupling as well. For example, in Figure 15 there is cross-coupling between the vertically oriented lines and the horizontally oriented lines. Additionally, there is cross-coupling associated with where a match pickup (i.e. connection) occurs. That is, where a via is

to connect the source of transistor Q22 in Figure 14 to a High_Match line (shown schematically in Figure 14) physically in Figure 15 influences cross-coupling to, for example, the Data_Line in Figure 15.

[0056] Figure 18 illustrates a layout 1800 for a TCAM cell showing two TCAM cells (TCAM cell 1 and TCAM cell 2) (each shown by dashed lines) for one embodiment of the invention. For illustrative purposes only straight metal lines are shown, and only two via interconnects High_Match_2 Via Pickup, and High_Match_1 Via Pickup are shown. Each dashed line box indicates a single TCAM cell. This single TCAM cell may be repeated to produce a group of cells. Additionally for illustrative purposes, example metal layers for this embodiment are denoted. Here on metal layer 2 is Low_Match. Running substantially parallel to Low_Match, from left to right, on metal layer 3 is Value_Bit_Line, Data_Line, Value_Bit_Line*, Mask_Bit_Line, Data_Line*, and Mask_Bit_Line*. Running substantially perpendicular to Low_Match, from top to bottom, is High_Match_2 on metal 4, High_Match_1 on metal 4, Bypass_1 on metal 5, Bypass_2 on metal 5, High_Match_1 on metal 4, and High_Match_2 on metal 4.

[0057] Via interconnect High_Match_2 Via Pickup in TCAM cell 1 is shown as a dark dotted box on High_Match_2 and may, for illustrative purposes, be considered to extend normal to the paper surface downward to connect to, for example, the source of Q22 in Figure 14. High_Match_2 Via Pickup traverses the metal layers (including metal 3) as it connects to a device in the TCAM cell and is physically separated from Data_Line on metal 3 by Value_Bit_Line* on metal 3, and from Data_Line* on metal 3 by Mask_Bit_Line on metal 3. This separation, as compared with Figure 16, leads to less capacitive and

Via Pickup and Data_Line*. Additionally, in the embodiment illustrated in Figure 18, as compared with Figure 5, the match pickup (High_Match Via Pickup in Figure 5, High_Match_2 Via Pickup in Figure 18) is located a farther distance from the Data_Line and Data_Line*. This increased distance leads to less capacitive and inductive coupling between High_Match_2 Via Pickup and Data_Line, and High_Match_2 Via Pickup and Data_Line*.

[0058] Via interconnect High_Match_1 Via Pickup in TCAM cell 2 is shown as a dark dotted box on High_Match_1 and may, for illustrative purposes, be considered to extend normal to the paper surface downward to connect to, for example, the source of Q22 in Figure 14 for TCAM cell 2. High_Match_1 Via Pickup traverses the metal layers (including metal 3) as it connects to a device in the TCAM cell and is physically separated from Data_Line on metal 3 by Value_Bit_Line* on metal 3, and from Data_Line* on metal 3 by Mask_Bit_Line on metal 3. This separation, as compared with Figure 5, leads to less capacitive and inductive coupling between High_Match_1 Via Pickup and Data_Line, and High_Match_1 Via Pickup and Data_Line*. Additionally, in the embodiment illustrated in Figure 18, as compared with Figure 5, the match pickup (High_Match Via Pickup in Figure 5, High_Match_1 Via Pickup in Figure 18) is located a farther distance from the Data_Line and Data_Line*. This increased distance leads to less capacitive and inductive coupling between High_Match_1 Via Pickup and Data_Line, and High_Match_1 Via Pickup and Data_Line*.

[0059] Additionally, Figure 18 illustrates two high match lines High_Match_1 and High_Match_2. Since there are two high match lines, for a given array of cell sizes, they

a similar array size. Thus, the capacitive load on each match line may be less than that of using a single match line.

[0060] Additionally, Figure 18 illustrates two bypass lines Bypass_1 and Bypass_2.

Since there are two bypass lines, for a given array of cells having a sense amplifier, they need only connect to, for example, half the number of cells as that illustrated in Figure 4.

Thus, the capacitive load on each bypass line may be less than that of using a single bypass line.

[0061] Figure 19 illustrates a layout 1900 for a TCAM cell showing two TCAM cells (TCAM cell 1 and TCAM cell 2) (each shown by dashed lines) for one embodiment of the invention. For illustrative purposes only straight metal lines are shown, and only two via interconnects Low_Match Via Pickup are shown. Each dashed line box indicates a single TCAM cell. This single TCAM cell may be repeated to produce a group of cells.

Additionally for illustrative purposes, example metal layers for this embodiment are denoted. Here on metal layer 2 is Low_Match. Running substantially parallel to Low_Match, from left to right, on metal layer 3 is Value_Bit_Line, Data_Line, Value_Bit_Line*, Mask_Bit_Line, Data_Line*, and Mask_Bit_Line*. Running substantially perpendicular to Low_Match, from top to bottom, is High_Match_2 on metal 4, High_Match_1 on metal 4, Bypass_1 on metal 5, Bypass_2 on metal 5, High_Match_1 on metal 4, and High_Match_2 on metal 4.

[0062] Via interconnect Low_Match_2 Via Pickup in TCAM cell 1 and TCAM cell 2 is shown as a dark dotted box on Low_Match and may, for illustrative purposes, be considered to extend normal to the paper surface downward to connect to, for example, the

drain of Q26 in Figure 14 for each TCAM cell. Low_Match Via Pickup traverses the metal

layers (including metal 1) as it connects to a device in the TCAM cell and is physically separated from Data_Line on metal 3 by Value_Bit_Line* on metal 3, and from Data_Line* on metal 3 by Mask_Bit_Line on metal 3. This separation, as compared with Figure 16, leads to less capacitive and inductive coupling between Low_Match Via Pickup and Data_Line, and Low_Match Via Pickup and Data_Line*. Additionally, in the embodiment illustrated in Figure 19, as compared with Figure 17, the Low_Match Via Pickup is located a farther distance from the Data_Line and Data_Line*. This increased distance leads to less capacitive and inductive coupling between Low_Match Via Pickup and Data_Line, and Low_Match Via Pickup and Data_Line*.

[0063] One of skill in the art will appreciate that cross-coupling between lines may be reduced by intervening line(s) and/or greater distance between lines. Thus, the present invention, in other embodiments, may have intervening lines on one or more layers, lines layers apart, as well as lines on different layers.

[0064] The preceding discussion dealt primarily with match line vias and cross-coupling. One of skill in the art will appreciate that via cross-coupling applies to any via, not just match line vias. For example, the Data_Line and Data_Line* as illustrated in Figure 19 will have vias that connect the respective lines to, for example, the gate of Q25 and Q26 as shown in Figure 14.

[0065] Figure 20 illustrates one embodiment of the invention 2000 showing a single Data_Line via (Data_Line Via Pickup). The Data_Line via (Data_Line Via Pickup) connects between a device on the substrate and metal 3 where the Data_Line is routed. TCAM cell as indicated by the dashed lines has, going left to right, and top to bottom: Value_Bit_Line

(metal 3), Data_Line Via Pickup point which is on Data_Line (metal 3), Value_Bit_Line*

(metal 3), Low_Match (metal 4), Mask_Bit_Line (metal 3), Data_Line* (metal 3), Mask_Bit_Line* (metal 3), an arbitrary line denoted X (metal 2), Match (metal 2), and Bypass (metal 5).

[0066] Figure 21 illustrates one embodiment of the invention 2100 showing only metal 2 for the TCAM cell illustrated in Figure 20. Here on metal 2 is the Data_Line Via Pickup via, the Match line, and line X. As may be seen, line X is between the Data_Line Via Pickup via and the Match line. Having X between the Data_Line Via Pickup via and the Match line reduces the cross-coupling between the Data_Line Via Pickup via and the Match line.

[0067] One of skill in the art will appreciate that this same approach to placing a route between other routes and/or between vias and routes may be used to reduce cross-coupling between lines as needed.

[0068] Thus a method and apparatus for a CAM with reduced cross-coupling interference have been described.

[0069] For purposes of discussing and understanding the invention, it is to be understood that various terms are used by those knowledgeable in the art to describe techniques and approaches. Furthermore, in the description, for purposes of explanation, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. It will be evident, however, to one of skill in the art that the present invention may be practiced without these specific details. In some instances, well-known structures and devices are shown in block diagram form, rather than in detail, in order to avoid obscuring the present invention. These embodiments are described in sufficient detail to enable those of skill in the art to practice the invention, and it is to be understood

that other embodiments may be utilized and that logical, mechanical, electrical, and other changes may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0070] Some portions of the description may be presented in terms of algorithms and symbolic representations of operations on, for example, data bits within a computer memory, and/or logic circuitry. These algorithmic descriptions and representations are the means used by those of skill in the arts to most effectively convey the substance of their work to others of skill in the art. An algorithm is here, and generally, conceived to be a self-consistent sequence of acts leading to a desired result. The acts are those requiring physical manipulations of physical quantities. Usually, though not necessarily, these quantities take the form of electrical or magnetic signals capable of being stored, transferred, combined, compared, and otherwise manipulated. It has proven convenient at times, principally for reasons of common usage, to refer to these signals as bits, values, elements, symbols, characters, terms, numbers, or the like.

[0071] It should be borne in mind, however, that all of these and similar terms are to be associated with the appropriate physical quantities and are merely convenient labels applied to these quantities.

[0072] Further, any of the methods according to the present invention can be implemented in hard-wired circuitry, by programmable logic, or by any combination of hardware and software.

[0073] It is to be understood that various terms and techniques are used by those knowledgeable in the art to describe communications, protocols, applications, implementations, mechanisms, etc. One such technique is the description of an

is, while the technique may be, for example, implemented as executing code on a computer, the expression of that technique may be more aptly and succinctly conveyed and communicated as a formula, algorithm, or mathematical expression. Thus, one of skill in the art would recognize a block denoting $A+B=C$ as an additive function whose implementation in hardware and/or software would take two inputs (A and B) and produce a summation output (C). Thus, the use of formula, algorithm, or mathematical expression as descriptions is to be understood as having a physical embodiment in at least hardware and/or software.

[0074] A machine-readable medium is understood to include any mechanism for storing or transmitting information in a form readable by a machine (e.g., a computer). For example, a machine-readable medium includes read only memory (ROM); random access memory (RAM); magnetic disk storage media; optical storage media; flash memory devices; electrical, optical, acoustical or other form of propagated signals (e.g., carrier waves, infrared signals, digital signals, etc.); etc.

[0075] As used in this description, "sense amplifier" or "sense circuit" or similar phrases are to be understood to refer to devices used to sense the state of signals (such as voltage). So, for example, a sense amplifier may be a sense circuit based on devices that is used to sense the voltage or logic level of a signal or to compare one or more signals to each other and/or a reference. The phrases are often used interchangeably and understood by one of skill in the art in relation to the context in which they are used. For example, an AND logic function whose inputs are connected to, for example, match lines where a logic high denotes a match, would produce a high signal when there is a match, and a low signal when there is not a match.

[0076] As used in the description the asterisk symbol (*) following a signal name is used to indicate an inverted or complemented version of the non-asterisked signal name. For example, if Data_Line is moving from a low voltage to a higher voltage, Data_Line* will be moving from a higher voltage to a lower voltage. Because of timing delays, voltage drops, etc. the two signals may not change at the exact same time or to the same exact levels. Additionally, a signal and its complement are often called a differential pair to indicate that the signals when signaling information will generally move in opposite directions, for example, one may move lower in voltage while the other increases in voltage. Thus, the use of, "complement of X" or "substantially inverted version of X" where X is additional text, or use of the asterisk, or the word "bar" following a signal name, or similar phrases, are to be understood to refer to signals that will generally be moving in different directions when communicating a signal. One of skill in the art understands this.

[0077] As used in this description, "via", "pickup via", or similar phrases are to be understood as connections between two points. A "via" is generally understood, in an integrated circuit (IC) context, as a technique for connecting a point at a lower layer of an IC to a higher layer of an IC. This often involves traversing layers and the use of "vertical" structures, such as, but not limited to, plugs, layer N metal to layer N+1 metal connections, etc. One of skill in the art understands this.

[0078] As used in this description, "line(s) between X line and Y line", or similar phrases are to be understood as intervening lines when viewed normal to an integrated circuit surface. It specifically does not require that the lines all be on the same layer. For example, if viewed from above an IC, left to right on layer 1 are vertical lines labeled A, B,

C. Likewise, if viewed from above an IC, left to right are vertical lines labeled A (on layer 1), B (on layer 2), and C (on layer 1), then it is to be understood that B is again between A and C and intervenes between A and C.

[0079] As used in this description, "one embodiment" or "an embodiment" or similar phrases means that the feature(s) being described are included in at least one embodiment of the invention. References to "one embodiment" in this description do not necessarily refer to the same embodiment; however, neither are such embodiments mutually exclusive. Nor does "one embodiment" imply that there is but a single embodiment of the invention. For example, a feature, structure, act, etc. described in "one embodiment" may also be included in other embodiments. Thus, the invention may include a variety of combinations and/or integrations of the embodiments described herein.

[0080] Thus a method and apparatus for a CAM with reduced cross-coupling interference have been described.